



Low-Income Children Deserve Our Support

By Judd Gregg

Regardless of their race, religion or economic status, America's children represent the promise of the future. As such, all children should have access to the necessary health care services. For those low-income children whose families don't qualify for Medicaid, but yet are unable to afford private health insurance, the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP, is a lifeline.

We can all agree that the SCHIP program should be continued, so that all low-income children have the health insurance coverage they need. Last year, 6.6 million children from families between 100% and 200% of the poverty level received health insurance through SCHIP, and I fully support increasing this effort by 60% over the next five years.

But instead of a reasonable 60% increase to cover all low-income children, Democrats in Congress want to ignore the original intent of SCHIP and radically expand the program by as much as 300% -- admitting higher-income families and adults, and passing the cost on to taxpayers. Like the President and many of my colleagues, I cannot support this scheme. Here is why:

The original intent of SCHIP was very simple -- to provide health insurance coverage assistance to low-income families that didn't qualify for Medicaid. However, instead of focusing on low-income children, the current bill allows families with incomes as high as \$83,000 to qualify, effectively *tripling* the size of the program.

To make matters worse, the current bill purports to cost \$71 billion over ten years, but actually includes a budget gimmick to make the bill appear to be paid for, by reducing spending on SCHIP by 80% in 2013. Now, we all know that government programs don't decline in spending by 80% in one year. The true cost of the bill is more than \$120 billion, not the \$71 billion the authors claim.

And under the current bill, many of the dollars spent on the program would be going to cover children who already have insurance. In fact, of the 4.4 million children expected to be added to the SCHIP program over the next five years, 1.6 million already have private sector coverage. In other words, more than 36% of the cost of the SCHIP expansion is for children who already have private sector health care coverage.

The current bill also eliminates the Administration's effort to set accountability benchmarks to ensure states improve their efforts to get low-income kids on the program, includes a special earmark for Michigan that takes \$200 million away from the SCHIP program next year, and includes language that will make it more difficult to ensure that illegal immigrants can't enroll in Medicaid.

Equally troubling is that this bill is another step in the majority's march toward the nationalization of U.S. health care. I have long opposed health care being in the hands of the federal government, as we have seen this system in other countries lead to rationing of health care services, a significant reduction in investment in medical and pharmaceutical research and development, and a hike in taxes to pay for it. Clearly, that approach would be harmful to the country's health, both physically and economically.

So while I fully support ensuring that all low-income children receive the health care services they deserve, I regretfully cannot support the way this program is being used to expand the size of government, advance a national healthcare system, and pass the cost along to hard-working Americans.

Rather than changing the original purpose of the program, we must continue to work to cover those children who are eligible but not yet enrolled in the SCHIP program. Therefore, I continue to support a reasonable compromise between the President and the Democrats that refocuses the SCHIP program on low-income children, not adults. This compromise legislation would provide more than \$39 billion in total SCHIP funding over the next five years, a 60% increase.

How would this compromise legislation impact New Hampshire? Currently, the New Hampshire's Healthy Kids program covers children in families at 300% of poverty, making approximately \$61,950 a year. Under this compromise, New Hampshire would continue to receive 65 cents from the federal government for every dollar spent to provide coverage for children in families under 235% of poverty (\$48,527 a year). However, if New Hampshire chooses to cover children from families with higher incomes, then the state would receive a slightly-reduced 50% match from the federal government.

It is time to reach a compromise. Now is not the time to play politics with children's lives. We need to work together in a bipartisan way to reauthorize the SCHIP program for the people it is intended to benefit -- low-income children who need and deserve our support.

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